Australian Academy of the Humanities Learned Academies Special Project

Future Humanities Workforce Project Consultation

Australian Historical Association Submission

The Australian Historical Association (AHA) is the peak national body of historians that includes academic, professional and other historians working in all fields of history. The AHA currently has over 900 members which includes established scholars as well as mid-career, early career historians and post graduate students. The AHA hosts an annual conference and runs the journal *History Australia*, published by Taylor & Francis four times a year.

Consultation questions:

1.   What are humanities researchers' (and humanities graduates' more broadly) most distinctive and important skills and capabilities?

- Critical thinking and the capacity to apply their skills to a wide set of questions and contexts.

- Research skills and ability to uncover and relate literature from a breadth of fields.

- Ability to disseminate results, writing for a range of readers and communities, and contributing to public debate.

- History graduates are able to bring a well-rounded education and understandings of numerous areas of cultural life in trying to solve problems (whether they be small problems in a workplace or bigger problems facing humanity).

2.   What are the current skills and capability gaps?

a.   In the academic workforce?

- Humanities graduates often have a gap in quantitative research and analysis.

- Ability to work creatively with digital technologies

- Outside of digital humanities – data analysis, text analysis, technology development, infrastructure development are often gaps.

b.   In the wider workforce?

- Project management, finding and applying evidence from legitimate/verifiable sources.

3.   Which skills and capabilities are most valued and where are they used?

a.   In the academic workforce?

- It is taken as a given that staff have the technical/ subject specific expertise
- Flexibility
- Time management
- Collegiality
- Multi-tasking
- Writing/communication

b.   In the wider workforce?

- Ability to produce succinct, clear ways of transmitting information about what are usually complex and nuanced ideas.

4.   What are future knowledge, skills and capabilities that humanities researchers will require?

- Written and oral presentation skills.
- Ability to construct and deliver a supported argument on a given topic.
- Communication (beyond technical expertise) and critical thinking skills.
- Technical skills including computer literacy [taking this further – digital literacy, working with and developing new and existing technologies to assist with research and communication of research].
- Capacity to undertake a wide range of research in a time poor environment.
- Interpersonal skills.
- Collaboration, working with different communities.
- Navigating ethics.
- The ability to critically analyse digital tools, collections, services, and interfaces to unpack their assumptions and imagine alternatives.
- An understanding of the varieties, transformations, possibilities, and limitations of digital data, and the ability to reflect on the technical and ethical challenges of collecting, using, and sharing it.

5.   What can the humanities contribute to the data and digital literacy agenda over the next decade?

- Humanities scholars are in a good position to offer a human centered view of digital data and literacy. This includes cultural and social overlay of any metadata developed and ethical considerations. Humanities scholars can contribute a values-centric approach to an otherwise technically focused venture.

- A richer understanding of the contexts in which digital data, tools and services are created and used.

- An ability to plumb the human dimensions of data, to explore uncertainty and messiness, not as problems to be eliminated, but as questions to be explored.

- An appreciation of creativity and play in the analysis and exploration of data.

- An ability to embed digital tools and data within complex narratives that enrich both our understanding of the data and the richness of our narratives.

- An ability to engage the public as collaborators in the construction, use, and enrichment of digital tools, services, and collections.

- A commitment to engage with and promote a variety of voices and perspectives to ensure that digital tools, collections, and data do not reinforce existing inequalities and prejudices.

6.   What are the best practice models for supporting early career researchers (ECRs)?

- The question of how best to support early career researchers, dealt with in questions 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10, is closely related to the broader question of casualisation of the academic workforce. The two are not identical – casualisation can sometimes affect mid and senior researchers too, and some early career researchers have full time secure academic position – but on the whole early career researchers are much more likely to be affected by the processes of casualisation than their middle and later career counterparts. With this in mind, we preface our answers to questions 6-10 with some general comments on casualisation.

- We acknowledge that this issue cuts across all disciplines and affects the humanities as much as STEM. There have been a plethora of studies, reports, blogs and articles on this topic. See, for example, https://overland.org.au/2019/05/the-casualties-of-academia-a-response-to-the-conversation/

- In August 2018, the NTEU reported that around 35% of individuals have permanent employment in Australian universities, with the rest on various forms of contract, sessional and casual employment. https://www.nteu.org.au/col/article/The-Flood-of-Insecure-Employment-20784

- To better understand how historians are affected by casualisation in the university sector, the AHA conducted a survey in March 2019 (the final report

is still being completed). The purpose of the survey was to gain a better understanding of the experiences of casual academics regarding the nature of their employment and its impact on their career path. One finding emerging from the survey is that the pattern of going from short-term contract to short-term contract is exhausting and relentless. Some ECRs are tempted to quit academic work altogether because it is difficult to combine casual work with family and financial commitments. As ECRs generally earn less than more established scholars, the expenses of attending academic conferences is of great concern. The lack of secure and continuing workspace is another concern, with history contract staff typically finding the "hot desks" allocated, if anything allocated at all, quite unsuited to the way historians work.

- In the view of the AHA, we need government and university policies aimed at reducing the proportion of teaching and research undertaken on a short-term contract basis and creating more secure career paths for both teachers and researchers. There is likely, however, to be at least some continuing practice of hiring humanities teachers and researchers on short term contracts, and as a result we also need policies aimed at providing better support for those academics. Considering the suggestions made by those who conducted the AHA survey, and in a series of responses to an article in *The Conversation*,[1] we suggest the following:

- Recognise the importance of honorary status for contract academics (email address, library status, staff profile page, access to shared workspace), and accordingly develop clear criteria for granting such status and consider granting it for a considerably longer period than the contract. Some universities are considering lifelong email access for alumni, this could/should be considered for adjuncts and honoraries.

- Include in contracts for teaching staff and research assistants who are not receiving publishing credit a number of paid research hours per week, to ensure that such staff are being paid for the research they are doing to assist them to remain on a research or teaching-and-research career path.[2]

- Develop appropriate forms of authorial credit to research assistants.

- Provide mentoring and career advice for all contract academics as a matter of course.

- Assist contract staff to attend conferences and undertake research travel.

- Provide effective, organic, critical and honest mentoring for ECRs to help them navigate the system that *is* casualised and *does* have many expectations, most of which are not written down anywhere.

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[1] Dorothy Wardale, Julia Richardson, and Yuliani Suseno, "Casual academics aren't going anywhere, so what can universities do to ensure learning isn't affected?", *The Conversation*, 8 April 2019 https://theconversation.com/casual-academics-arent-going-anywhere-so-what-can-universities-do-to-ensure-learning-isnt-affected-113567

[2] Effie Karageorgos, https://ahaecr.wordpress.com/2019/05/03/a-conversation-about-casualisation-part-three/

7. Do ECRs in the humanities experience different or additional challenges compared to their peers in other disciplines?

- There is a bias (perceived or otherwise) against the humanities in many universities with the arts and humanities the first areas to feel financial pressures and endure cuts.

- Australian Research Council (ARC) vetoing of research grants clearly disadvantaged Humanities scholars. We are yet to see any redress of this issue.

- Work in the Humanities tends to be more individualized, which makes it harder for ECRs than the sciences, where there are often big projects and professors who recruit people into teams. Those opportunities are rare (but not non-existent) in the Humanities.

8. Do ECRs in the humanities experience different or additional challenges compared to mid-career or senior staff?

- ECRs suffer the effects of precariousness of employment to a much greater extent than mid-career or senior staff. For the effects, see answer to question 6.

- Often within the humanities there is a belief that ECRs have fewer numeracy (or financial literacy) skills than their colleagues in the STEM fields. This is less an issue for mid/senior staff as most of us have had to learn/ polish our financial literacy as a consequence of administrative roles and budgetary responsibilities.

- ECRs tend to have heavier teaching loads than mid-career or senior staff.

9. What do ECRs see as challenges in their career progression?

- Limited jobs beyond casual opportunities.

- Forever gaining experience in casual work but never getting beyond a 'foot-in-the-door' in the academy.

- Not having the contacts that will help them get ahead.

- The perception that the standard academic vision of an ECR is of a younger person and that age discrimination may be taking place.

- Women ECRs especially (but not exclusively) have the problem of career interruptions that are not adequately accounted for.

10. How do we better track the career trajectories of ECRs?

- It would be very useful to have some longitudinal data to be able to understand the career trajectories of not only ECRs but also HDR students across the Humanities. For example, as outlined in the *AAH-FHW Literature Review*, it would be very useful to have a similar initiative and study such as that of the American Historical Association's Career Diversity for Historians Initiative (founded in 2012) which has recently produced the document, *Where*

Historians Work. This could provide vital data to enable us to better understand these increasingly complex workplace situations and help to future proof our humanities workforce. It has been suggested that the Australian Historical Association undertake a regular survey, perhaps on a biennial basis, in order to capture the HDR and ECR experiences. As a small, member-based volunteer-led peak body, the AHA has limited capacity to undertake any larger initiatives but would be willing to work with other organisations such as the Australian Academy of the Humanities in a co-operative endeavour.

11.   What are the most pressing inequities in the humanities workforce today?

- The casualisation of the academic workforce, and its consequences especially for ECRs, is the most pressing issue today.

- Under-representation of Indigenous people, especially within University work forces.

- See the Australian Women's History Network's July 2018 report on sexual and gender based harassment in the workforce. http://www.auswhn.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/AWHN-survey-of-sexual-and-gender-based-discrimination-and-abuse.pdf

12.   What initiatives are most effective in addressing inequity?

- One of the ways of addressing inequity is to have access to current ongoing data and information on the Humanities more broadly and the disciplines that sit within it. Over the years, the AHA has attempted to do this by commissioning surveys and reports on the state of the History discipline. In March 2018, the AHA executive released a report *The State of the Discipline: University History in Australia and New Zealand.*

- The report sought to track the progression or regression of the History discipline in the tertiary sector and assess the effects of changes in student interest, funding priorities, fee deregulation, and the growing cost of a university education.

- The report examined staffing and curriculum issues but controversially excluded casual and honorary staff (although it did include fellowship holders, those on fixed-term appointments of more than 1 year) (p. 10). This omission has been rectified with the March 2019 casualisation survey currently underway. While there was attention to gender balances, there was no attempt to capture elements of other forms of diversity within the discipline, such as the number of Indigenous historians working in the sector (this remains outstanding).

- The key findings of relevance to this Future Humanities Workforce consultation process was that when the Go8 sector and non-Go8 sectors are compared, the former had fewer historians overall but more holding postdoctoral or other fellowships (mostly funded by the ARC). The majority of historians were in continuing roles (it is important to remember here, however, that those with contracts of one year or less were not included in the

survey) with the overall numbers largely steady since 2000. The numbers of senior roles, at Professor/Associate Professor was considerably higher than previously especially in the Go8 universities (perhaps indicating greater research opportunities and more endowed chairs) with a bulge at Senior Lecturer in non-Go8.

- In terms of gender, in the History discipline today, across all appointment types (excluding casuals), the results were 49% female to 51% male, which compares well to other comparable disciplines in the Humanities such as Philosophy and Political Science. However, women in History remain under-represented at the senior levels (58% to 42% at Professor and 57% to 43% at Associate Professor); are more highly represented in the fixed term fellowship category; and over represented in the HDR space which could indicate less stable future employment prospects with relentless casualisation.

- Under-represented groups include (but are not limited to) Australian Indigenous and Torres Straight Islanders. Of the over 900 members of the AHA less than 10 identify as Indigenous. Offering fee relief for membership did not increase this number, even though we know informally that there are many more who are working in this space and could be included/ involved. It is a similar story with other groups such as Muslim historians.

13.   What are the challenges to achieving a more inclusive agenda?

- Government funding policies for the tertiary sector, student fees, and the corporate university.

- Perception of relevancy within those communities we recognize as under-represented.

14.   Could initiatives within the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields, such as the Athena SWAN and Race Equality Charters, serve as useful models for the humanities sector?

- The interdisciplinary Centre of Excellence for Biodiversity and Heritage (which includes significant humanities and social science researchers along with STEM has established a program for supporting women and Indigenous researchers. Some of the initiatives include the provision of generous carer's grants for fieldwork, travel or conferences, formalized mentoring programs, and a charter of behavior (aimed squarely as a response to #metoo). In addition, there are workshops and masterclasses on a range of topics; including, writing for a wide audience, time management, work life balance, career planning, as well as numerous technical skills development sessions.